

[GEN. (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) India has noted the remarks made by the President of the United States on the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 8 May, 2018. US has decided to re-impose sanctions on Iran as a result of its withdrawal from JCPOA.

India is not a party to the JCPOA. The other remaining parties to the JCPOA (UK, France, Germany, Russia, China, Iran and the European Union) have stated that they will abide by the Agreement. India continues to monitor the developments and study the implications of the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. Government will take all necessary measures to safeguard our national interest.

Warning of USA against oil imports from Iran

192. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the United States of America has told all the countries, including India to stop their oil imports from Iran by November or face sanctions; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GEN. (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) On 08 May 2018, the US announced that it would withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and re-impose the U.S. sanctions, including on petroleum related transactions involving Iran, in two stages effective 6 August, 2018 and 4 November, 2018.

India has maintained that the Iranian nuclear issue should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy by respecting Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy as also the international community's strong interest in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. All parties should engage constructively to address and resolve issues that have arisen with respect to the JCPOA.

Abduction of Indian fishermen

†193. SHRI LAL SINH VADODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether cases of abducting Indian fishermen and capturing their boats has come to light;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

- (b) if so, whether Government has taken any steps, so far, in this regard; and
- (c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GEN. (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) There is no information about any abduction of Indian fishermen. However, from time to time, Indian fishermen have been arrested by Sri Lankan and Pakistani authorities for allegedly fishing in their territorial waters. Currently, there are no Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody. As on 17 July 2018, there are 176 Indian fishing vessels in Sri Lankan custody. As per available information, currently there are 418 fishermen who are Indian or believed to be Indian and more than 1050 Indian fishing boats in Pakistan's custody. However, Pakistan does not acknowledge the number of boats of Indian fishermen in their custody.

(b) and (c) Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. Government regularly takes up the matter of apprehension of Indian fishermen and their fishing boats with the Governments of Sri Lanka and Pakistan for their early release.

With Sri Lanka, the fishermen issues have been raised at the highest level including by the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister. Following the 2+2 initiative in November 2016 when the Foreign and Fisheries Ministers of the two countries met in New Delhi, a bilateral Joint Working Group (JWG) mechanism was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues with Sri Lanka. It was also agreed that Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries meet every six months to review the progress. As a result of sustained diplomatic efforts, Government has so far secured the release of 2329 fishermen and 288 boats from Sri Lankan custody since 2014.

Government continues to take various measures to diversify our fishermen from the ecologically unsustainable method of bottom trawling to deep sea fishing using tuna long-liners. Government has initiated the "Assistance for Deep Sea Fishing" scheme to support the fishermen in this pursuit. Prime Minister had unveiled the scheme in the Palk Bay area in July 2017. Several batches of fishermen have been trained so far in deep-sea fishing, long-lining and onboard handling and processing of fish.

The High Commission of India in Islamabad, on a continuing basis, provides humanitarian and legal assistance to Indian nationals imprisoned in Pakistan, including regular distribution of items of daily necessity to them through Pakistani jail authorities. As a result of persistent efforts, Government has secured the release and repatriation of 1699 Indian fishermen and 57 Indian fishing boats from Pakistan since 2014.